

For the Record . . .

Mr. Agnew's Plan for "Examining" Newscasters . . .

The following excerpts are from an appearance by Vice President Agnew on *Kup's Show*, WMAQ-TV, in Chicago, on October 20, 1970

Q. I'd like to ask something about politics and TV. It was about a year ago in Des Moines that you made that speech attacking the TV commentators who came on after the President's Vietnam speech, and I remember you criticized one of them for even raising an eyebrow—and when you said that the President has a right to communicate with the people without having his thoughts characterized through the prejudices of hostile critics before they can even be digested. What I want to ask is: aren't you really saying there that these people have no right to analyze and interpret the President—which is generally thought to be one of the classic roles of the press?

A. I thought—that the analysis is all right as long as it's balanced. Now, what happened in that case was that there was nothing but hostile criticism revealed to the public after that speech. I've really asked for more analysis, not less. I'd like to see more conservative commentators or people who reflect an opposite point of view. And that leads me to an interesting question I'd like to ask you both. I had a letter the other day suggesting that it would be a big benefit to the public if some of the premier news commentators, for example those that have had extremely wide exposure such as yourself or the network commentators, were examined by a group of people in government to explore in depth your opinions, your prejudices, if you will, if you have some, so that in the future the people who watch you would have a chance to know what underlying philosophy you have. Editorial comment must creep into talk shows to some extent. . . . but I'm talking about the network commentators, people like Eric Sevareid and Howard K. Smith and people of that type. Don't you think it would be beneficial for the viewing audience to know what they believe, so that when they characterize certain things, that there be some understanding of what their underlying philosophy is . . .

Q

Q. Wouldn't you, Mr. Vice President, be criticized for government interference in the right of free speech? Anytime that government steps into any kind of an activity like this where free speech, or the press or commentators . . . ?

A. No, I said people in government—public officials to examine these people—not in a sense of demanding an examination, but simply at their own free will—as I come here of my own free will to be questioned by you. Would you be willing to go on a program where some people in the Senate or the House questioned you? I mean simply an interesting probe into your convictions so that the people that watch Eric Sevareid, for

example, would know where he stands on the issues he talks about. Don't you think that would be valuable? . . .

Q

Q. Well, would it be voluntary, or would you say we have a committee, and we want you to come down? That's not very voluntary . . .

A. Now, I've got to clear that up, because I can see you're headed in the wrong direction on it. All I mean was nobody demanded that I come on your show. I would expect that nobody could demand that you would go on



VICE PRESIDENT SPIRO T. AGNEW

the kind of show I'm talking about. But I would think that if it would serve a useful purpose that you would be willing to appear on such a show, privately, not a government sponsored show, where the interrogation would be reversed. That's all I'm saying.

Q. . . . I'm curious about this—do you think it would turn up anyone with any subversive connections?

A. Boy, you fellows can really jump over 18 hurdles when you get on this subject. All I'm talking about is the people who are watching that tube have a right to know what your opinions are, if you happen to be a man who is telling the news every night, because you can select what parts of the news you want to emphasize and by your language you can convey a point of view that is not an editorial and yet is colored by

your own viewpoints. Now, I think the people ought to know what those viewpoints are. That's all I am saying.

Q. Well, you said in that Des Moines speech that networks should somehow be made more responsive to the views of the nation. Now, how on earth do you determine what the views of the nation are?

A. I hope you get some letters—I got a lot after that program. Let me say this: on that show—I know from talking to network executives—that they were inundated with mail telling them what the people thought about that, and it practically put them up the wall—and things have improved to some extent since then.

Q. Was that your intention, Mr. Vice President?

A. Not at all. I simply am drawing attention to a basic deficiency in our free communications system . . .

Q

Q. Well, you're not complaining then of the coverage you're getting in the press now?

A. No. I'm not complaining about the coverage at all, but what I am complaining about is editorial analysis in some areas which seems to be that there is something different about my rhetoric and everyone else's and I've tried to give some examples of that here this morning.

Q. But, certainly the press of the nation is largely Republican so this criticism in the editorial content must be minimal.

A. I have to disagree with that. The press of the nation, the press with real clout is far from being Republican. It's gathered and centered in the northeastern part of the United States, demonstrated by *Newsweek* magazine and other weeklies, by the two largest newspapers with the most services: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*. It's demonstrated through the activities in the wire services which are based in that part of the country and you can take the other press, the national press, and take the Eastern establishment out of it and in circulation you'll find that that small Eastern nucleus far outdoes the rest of the country.

Q. The paper with the largest circulation in the country is a firm supporter of the Nixon administration.

A. That's true. You're talking about the *New York Daily News*. The *New York Daily News* has supported the President, and we're very grateful for that support.

Q. The most influential paper on the West Coast is a strong Nixon supporter.

A. Which one is that?

Q. The *Los Angeles Times*.

A. I'd have to take exception.

Q. At any rate, you don't quarrel with their right to analyze, to interpret and criticize.

A. No, I hope you don't quarrel with my right to analyze, interpret and criticize them.

Q. I'm fascinated by your proposal which I think is the first time you've made—at

least the first time I've heard it— about having the commentators face some kind of a questioning. I wonder if you'd like to discuss that a little more because I think that's very interesting.

A. Yes, for example, we have some very widely followed shows — Meet the Press, Face the Nation, Issues and Answers — and talk shows such as yours. It would be very interesting to have a show—a panel type show where senators from either party, representatives, I suppose maybe a couple of governors—could sit down with someone who has a national reputation as a commentator, Frank Reynolds, someone like that, and just examine him in depth on where he stands personally on the issues he talks about every day.

Q. Well, doesn't he make that clear in his commentary?

A. I don't think he does, because he is allegedly reporting the news and not his own feelings.

Q. Oh, he does commentary too, though.

A. Well, when he gets into commentary, he gives, to some extent, his views, on limited issues, but he's never been really probed. Neither have any of these people ever been probed.

Q. Mr. Vice President, will you volunteer to be one of the interrogators on such a show, if one of the networks would set up such a show?

A. After November I'd be glad to do it. I'll be pretty busy until then.